

**Interview with Ezra Glasser
conducted by Linda Byrne for the
Providence District History Project Providence Perspective**

May 16, 2009

Linda: My name is Linda Byrne and I am sitting in the home of Ezra Glasser and the address is 2839 West George Mason Road in Falls Church and it is May 16, 2009 and the purpose of this interview is for the Providence Perspective History Project. It is nice to be here with you Mr. Glasser, if you will tell me about yourself.

Ezra Glasser: Well, I was born in Brooklyn in 1913. At that time Brooklyn was mostly a wooded area with relatively few streets that were not paved. I went to kindergarten there and James Madison High School for which I had to take the subway train, which was quite far away.

Linda: What year was that?

Ezra: Lets see I got out of college in 1934 and out of high school in about 1930. It was a good school and relatively few immigrants there. We had quite a few students who lived her for quite some time.

Linda: At what college did you attend?

Ezra: I went to NY University in Manhattan to which I could get to by subway and I graduated in 1934 with a Bachelors Degree majoring in Chemistry.

Linda: When did you come to this area of Fairfax County?

Ezra: After I graduated I went into the Army soon after when I came here I was still not a soldier I was registered as everybody was at that time for military service but at that time I was not serving, I was just living here.

Linda: Were you single at that time?

Ezra: No. Lets see I was married for almost 50 years so I was married soon after that. When I came here this was mostly a wooded area and only three houses on this side of the street. Across the street was one house, a big one on the hill and this whole area was a farm.

Linda: What was the name of this particular area?

Ezra: It was not called Greenway, it was just called Falls Church.

Linda: Was that around 1940?

Ezra: Yes early 1940 and there were no houses from here to down the bottom of the hill, no cross streets and the roads were not paved. The park had not yet been designated as a park, it was just a dirty stream and we had a certain number of wild animals and an occasional deer, muskrats. Between here and Rt. 7 was mostly brush and just bushes with very few habitations. My father was a builder and built my house here and several others in the area. They were very simple houses on 50 foot lots and I bought this one for \$5,000 it looked like the house across the street here and this beam across here was the outside of the house and there was no house on the other side of this one.

Linda: So you've added the room we are basically sitting in, which is lovely.

Ezra: This is exactly so. At that time I had one child, a boy and it there was a little problem finding playmates his age but the parents got together and fixed it up so the youngsters had boys and girls to play with.

Linda: What kinds of stories can you tell me about transportation back then and shopping?

Ezra: There were buses and I am trying to think how far the Metro Bus came at that time. I think it came up to the main crossing at Falls Church, which was Rt. 7 and Lee Highway and Lee Highway was called Fairfax County, I can't remember. It was the only highway going west and it went to the Court House in Fairfax County. The Court House was a small building surrounded by a couple of buildings filled with lawyers. There was no real

town there but a general store. Falls Church only had one store, which is still there at Lee Highway and Rt. 7. Rt. 7 was paved but that is about all you could say for it, there was practically nothing on that between the crossroads at Leesburg. It was all open fields with lots of cows, it was a big dairy area and from here west it was also a big dairy area with lots of cows.

Linda: So you were living here during the war.

Ezra: Well, I wasn't here long because I went into the Army soon after. I had a very important job for the military, which was so secret I couldn't tell anybody anything about it. It was actually an econometric study of this area and Germany to decide what area would be effective to drop bombs on and on this side how to recover if we were attacked. That was before I went into the Army actually.

Linda: Let me introduce Mrs. Jackie Evans, the current Mrs. Glaser.

Ezra: At that time I was married to Betti Goldwasser and when she died we had been married almost exactly 50 years. It was not long after that I was living alone and because of my increasing age my doctor insisted I have someone live here with me to take care of my medication.

Jackie: Do you want to tell Linda some more about after you went into the army?

Ezra: I was subject to that medication when I was in the Army. When I was drafted just routinely, the Army office was up here at the Falls Church crossing and it reported one that was in it was in Fairfax what was at that time also Fairfax. It was administered by an Army group at Fort Hamilton which was on the the other side of Columbia Road and when I was drafted I reported there.

By that time my assignment from my own initiative had gotten was very important and it took an advantage of an economist named Wassily Leontief. And so when we got going here I was assigned an office in the White House in the old State Department Building which was three stories high but it had a little super structures several places and I was assigned

one of those. And I had a staff of five, all women. When we brought Leontief down here to work on these things there was a question where he could stay so we moved him in here, he lived upstairs here. (in Ezra's home)

Jackie: What period of time was that Ezra?

Ezra: The early 40's and notwithstanding the importance of this military assignment; we had trouble getting his security clearance because he had been born in Russia. And so we had a - Russian language in this house.

Linda: How long was he with you?

Ezra: He was with me until I went into the Army and I am trying to remember and put a date on that, it was in the early 40's I still lived here while I was working in the White House.

Linda: Was that a difficult commute back then?

Ezra: Generally speaking the White House motor pool came to get me and bring me home again. In that assignment I had an elaborate collection of military and diplomatic people because of the work we were doing on Russia. It was so secret that when I got drafted I could not tell them about it. They asked what I worked at so I gave them a general description but I could not say I work in the White House or was in constant communication with the Vice President or Chief of Staff or a number of other people.

So I went into the Army as a Buck Private for a year and presently was put on a train and went South to Biloxi, Mississippi I never heard of it, and could not tell them what I was doing also, they would not have understood it. But by that time I wrote a book and a number of articles about these things but because it was so late in the war they were drafting people with children and I had two boys by that time and so for a short time I was in the Army but living here. Slowly they really began to build up including a lot of people with military connections, but because we were way out of town one drove past a lot of farm area before they came to Rt. 7 or Leesburg Pike then.

Linda: Now your and your wife raised your two boys in this house.

Ezra: Yes they lived here and in the house we which we had by that time I had extended adding this piece and I build this window myself in the garage.

Linda: And I am looking a 12 panel glass window with beautiful shelving between large panes of glass.

Ezra: Yes, I brought it up here and glued it altogether. The reason we made the addition was by that time I was having a second boy and we needed the space and my wife was also working and she had a part time servant who lived in the area and worked here.

Linda: What type of work did your wife do?

Ezra: She was an economist with a degree from Harvard. When I was drafted we needed a full time servant and we interviewed various people from the area and finally Vivian had a terrible time commuting from Maryland and came here to help.

Linda: After the war tell me your memories of this area.

Ezra: A lot more houses had been built and most of the families had military connections and the roads were slowly being paved and added cross streets which we didn't have and a lot of the woods were being cut down. I had a garden, this place was two lots and 100 feet wide and across the back 100 feet and I maintained, while I was here a big garden where I grew enough vegetables and as people moved in I found I had enough vegetables to supply them and myself.

Linda: Lets go back to 1950 or 51 when you were President of the National Statistical Society.

Ezra: I had a lot of leverage with the Statistical Society because of the work I was doing for the White House and I was eventually elected President and

I maintained an office in this building and we had a small office downtown, nothing like what is there now. We used it mostly for recruiting and assigning people during the war and that included people as far away as Leesburg.

Linda: I also want to go back to the depression, what kind of influence did that have on you and your family and what did you see happen to others?

Ezra: I was working all the time so it didn't affect me as much as it did the people in the neighborhood.

Linda: So after the depression then we went into the 40s and the war and you had a fabulous career and...

Ezra: When I got out of the Army we were still in the depression and that affected a lot of people who moved here.

Linda: When did you retire from your job?

Ezra: After the war I was discharged and went to work as an independent Statistical Consultant relating to the war and post war period.

Linda: As we moved forward into the 60's and the space age and that kind of thing, what do you recall there?

Ezra: When I got out of the Army there were post war problems that people were involved in and I got grabbed up by that and I worked on training and assigning some of those people out of an office on Columbia Pike which had a big establishment about Columbia Pike and Rt. 7 which is all built up now with big buildings but then there were only two wooden buildings. I lived here and worked there and Rt. 7 was barely paved and the problems were in the winters getting back and forth with the snow and ice.

Linda: How about you children going to schools, what were the schools like?

Ezra: My children went to Falls Church, or my older boy did. My younger boy was severely retarded and by that time they did not know much about that disease, he was autistic. So I rounded up a number of parents and we started a school here, which was the first school in the area for these youngsters. He didn't speak a word until he was nine and it turned out that there were a various retarded children for which there was no home at all so we launched an organization for which for a time I was Chairman of the Board and my wife was President and with the aide of Falls Church they organized a bus system to round these kids up and bring them to the school and he went to that school for a while. It has survived as a very fancy big brick building but we had an old wooden farmhouse and it was just a little off the crossing from here south to Leesburg and it wasn't paved, it became Rt. 7,

Linda: What was the name of the school that you started?

Ezra: It was an old farmhouse and some of the faculty lived there and it was close to the extension of 16th Street, which is where the White House was, and I can't recall.

Linda: You did this work in the 60's or 70's?

Ezra: We founded this school in the late 40's early 50's. The school grew and grew as the need became apparent and the various communities organized the attendance and tuition.

Linda: How many students do you think attended the school?

Ezra: We started with two dozen but when we moved to a permanent home in Georgetown. Oh, it was called the Georgetown Day School.

Linda: I know that school; I have a friend that has a student there.

Ezra: We called it that because it was close to Georgetown. It is still called that and it has become a big brick building that was strange to us.

One of the boundaries of the school was a big wire fence was the Army post at 16th Street which it turned out it played out a very big part of Army Intelligence. We had nothing to do with that except the fence was patrolled day and night with uniformed guards with guns patrolling day and night and in the winter there was nothing there but an open field and it was very cold and we would take them in for 10 minutes every hour so they would be warm and we could give them coffee and sandwiches.

Ezra: Hi Charley, (his dog) he is 5 and when she was brought home she would fit in the palm of your hand, you wouldn't believe it now. She is part cocker and

There was a farmer here between here and Fairfax with milk from his cows and he would deliver here.

Linda: So you had fresh milk and how often would he deliver?

Ezra: Three or four times a week and after a short time he also delivered cottage cheese, which was quite good, and he served the whole area because there was no other food supply here. Other than that we shopped at the general store at the crossing of what is now Lee Highway and Rt. 7 where there was a big store.

Linda: The man who delivered the milk was it in a motorized vehicle or a horse and cart.

Ezra: The man who delivered milk had a cart, horse drawn and he delivered milk and ice cream. The horse was trained and stopped at the houses with no instructions because he knew where he was suppose to deliver things and the youngsters were always a very favorite of this because they would run out and feed him carrot tops and spinach from the local gardens.

Linda: What other things do you remember from back in that time?

Ezra: It was slowly being modernized. I added to this house with increases in my book supply. I went on and studied Russian which I had been working with Leontiev who spoke Russian. It means son of Leon, in fact his whole name was L..... which meant Williamhis father and

grandfather were both Russian's named William. We had all kinds of problems with him because he didn't have a formal clearance even though he worked at the White House and it was funny because all the guards saluted him and most people didn't know who he was or what he was doing. We were very secret. We were very concerned that the Nazi's had the increasing bombing capability would come and attack the United States and the question was how we could survive that and so we had a number of military posts in the area which were on my committee.

Linda: What did your committee determine how we would survive something?

Ezra: The first question was what would we do if we were attacked? So there were all kinds of arrangements for storing information so if the main offices were attacked we would not lose the information. We were associated with a big airfield in Fairfax County, I can't remember what it was called, and that was a military post.

Linda: Was it Bolling Air Force Base across the river?

Ezra: No it was in Fairfax. Various times we had members of the guard visiting here and sometimes stay here. We were very closely associated with the military at that time.

Soon after the war, actually it was after Kennedy was assassinated, I was named Assistant Secretary of Commerce to take care of the military aspects of our programs not just the bomb program but the whole post war mobilization. I was working on various committees working on economic recovery of the whole area and at times for the whole country. At that time Ft. Hamilton became a big base with lots of airplanes and such. By then the whole area was being built up with roads and houses and we also had immigrant's coming in from other countries after the war and they also lived in this area.

At that time Falls Church was a very general name and it wasn't until after the war that boundaries were established and it turned out that this street and several other streets were in Fairfax County and not a part of the City

of Falls Church. So we divided Fairfax County, which was rapidly growing, and Falls Church the city and those boundaries still exist. We are in the postal district of Falls Church but not in the county. We are administered by Fairfax County Government, for example the deed for this place and all kinds of other things have to all be update to recognize that Fairfax County was our jurisdiction and we therefore pay taxes to Fairfax and not through Falls Church. Though we retain the name of Falls Church it is a community name encompassing the City of Falls Church and a whole lot of adjacent Fairfax area and postal district Falls Church in their name still is here at this address even though we are in Fairfax County. This confuses a lot of people because the postal district as a group serving the needs of an expanding population and a much more diversified population after the war and the and although it is called Falls Church it had nothing to do with the City of Falls Church.

Linda: Tell me a little about your hobbies, like singing.

Ezra: I organized a chorus, not single handedly and my wife also while we were still associated with the Georgetown Day School and the chorus was originally a church organization and it rapidly expanded and picked until it picked up all kinds of pieces including us.

At that time I was President of it, and for many years on the Board and I am still on the Board. It expanded far beyond care for a few backward children to a much larger community and it is now located in Fairfax County and it's membership is bigger. It is now called theMetropolitan Chorus. It had nothing to do with the day school but a lot of the parents were members and I was on the Board when it was formed.

Jackie: He may be thinking of another group, the Metropolitan Chorus is about 35 years old and it has always been home based in Arlington County; but the members for the chorus are from all over the metro area. We have people who come in from Maryland and D.C. and all over Virginia. For many years he was President of the Board and he rotated off ten years ago.

Linda: Tell me how you met your second wife, Jackie.

Jackie: You met me through the chorus after the first Mrs. Glasser died. Ezra maintained tickets to the Kennedy Center, Ballet, Shakespeare Theatre, Washington Opera so he would date female members of the chorus and after a while I became his symphony date and I think it was after the second date you started proposing and kept it up for eight or nine years. I had been through a very nasty divorce and decided I did not want to do that again but eventually he wore me down.

Ezra: It became apparent very soon that with her living in Maryland and working here.

Jackie: Ezra that was Vivian.

Ezra: That was Vivian your predecessor.

Jackie: No that was Vivian your caregiver, Evelyn's predecessor.

Ezra: The commuting with the Metro such as it was and the bus to go to Metro at both ends she would just about get home when it was time for her to come the next day so we decided that was a lot of nonsense and we arranged for her to live here and when Jackie....

Jackie: That was Evelyn. Ezra had remodeled one of the bedrooms upstairs and added a full bath onto that room so that made it very convenient for Vivian when she was here and then when she left Evelyn came and has been here ever since.

Linda: Jackie what other kinds of questions should I be asking? What a fabulous career he had.

Jackie: The career got more fabulous, Ezra do you want to talk about what you did with the Kennedy administration?

Ezra: As assistant Secretary of Commerce I was involved with all kinds of committees after the war dealing mostly with post war economic recovery. When he was assassinated I attended the funeral and I was one of the cabinet officers and I retained that job under President Johnson.

Jackie: Are there any other names we would recognize under your tenure there?

Ezra: I was in touch with a lot of the cabinet officers because this committee was very informal and it met in the White House and it tried to wrestle with the many post war economic problems that arose and kept changing and during that time I lived here but at that time the house was much bigger.

Jackie: Betty became very active in Fairfax County wasn't she?

Ezra: Yes, Betty did various things in Fairfax County but when I was Assistant Secretary of Commerce they used to send a White House car for me so I didn't have any trouble commuting either way and sometimes it was complicated because I was so busy I couldn't come home but they put me in one of the bedrooms at the White House and I stayed there with extra clothes and such.

So I lived there as a White House Staff and that was amusing because I came and went at the White House and was saluted by the uniformed guards and no one really knew who I was but I was the Chief Economist for the Recovery Committee.

Linda: Jackie mentioned that your first wife did some things in Fairfax County was she on any committees? Like what?

Jackie: There was a committee that you told me about and Betty was appointed Chair of the committee and everybody thought they were going to get a home economist to serve on the committee.

Ezra: She was on several post war economic recovery committees and when she gave the name of economist the committee had no idea what an economist was so they wrote home economist.

Jackie: Did that have something to do with the Water Shed?

Ezra: Yes we had Water Shed problems.

Jackie: I don't recall exactly what he told me about.

Linda: What is the Water Shed here?

Ezra: The Potomac Water Shed and it had problems of its own as it grew including undisciplined growth of farms a number of which had very poor sanitary systems so Betty got involved in writing the regulations enforcing them and going around to various farms and trying to establish decent public sanitation systems between here and Fairfax.

Linda: Now what are the biggest changes that you have seen in Fairfax County from the time you first moved here until today?

Ezra: Well it was mostly open fields and woods with just occasional houses and where the woods were cleared there were mostly dairy farms, there were other farms but most dairy farms. There were big open fields and forests between the building up in Fairfax County West of here so for a long time when I drove to Fairfax Court for whatever duties I drove past miles and miles of dairy farms.

[Pause in recording]

Linda: Mr. Glasser you were talking about the changes you have seen in Fairfax County over the years.

Ezra: Well it has grown into a residential area with population concentrations along the way but also some fairly big estates of original owners during which time parks were established and sanitary systems were organized and was operated as a city. When we first came here it wasn't like that at all it was open farmland with a couple of tree farms.

Jackie: What did Tyson's Corner look like?

Ezra: Tyson's Corner was a crossroads of what is now Rt. 7 and

Jackie: Is that 123?

Ezra: Yes, 123 and there was nothing there but a single building which had a general store, Bigalo's General Store and people came from all over for that. They first were a store serving dairy farms and slowly piece by piece it became a general store to serve the urban population and it still exists and it is call what now?

Jackie: Tyson's Corner?

Ezra: No.

Jackie: The Mall?

Ezra: No, it was at Lee Highway what is the name of the store there?

Jackie: It is Tyson's Corner Shopping Center.

Ezra: No, Tyson's Corner is about 5 miles away, this was Lee Highway and Rt. 7.

Jackie: Are you talking about the hardware store Mr. Brown's?

Ezra: The same family still owns it.

Linda: That would be up here in Falls Church?

Ezra: That was East Central Falls Church and that crossing was close to Falls Church. Lee Falls Church was about 10 acres of parkland.

Linda: Is there anything that you would like to say to future generations that will be moving into Fairfax County.

Ezra: I am trying to remember that there was no bridge at Chain Bridge there was a ferry that would carry cars. Glebe Road which runs from the central of Falls Church down to the river at Glebe there was a sign for the Parson at the church so the parson had extensive property all the way

down to the river at the present crossing near Little Falls and that of course was a lot of open land and what houses there were and were right along the street and there were also a lot of dairy farms there. It is hard to remember that between Glebe Road and Lee Highway and the river were mostly dairy farms with fields full of cows.

Linda: I talked to someone who remembered her father driving their cows out here from Fairlington out to the area where Fairfax Hospital is in the county now back in the 1940's.

Ezra: There were a lot of cows but it got built up of course with a residential community between Lee Highway and the river, it got built up piece by piece and it is hard when you see that Glebe Road was the property of the Falls Church, but it was. The pastor had his own farm there and it extended all the way down to the river. That is what a glebe is, it is a farm belonging to a church. You would go past a number of churches but most of them are nonexistent. Glebe Road was named for the churches at the Lee Highway Crossing.

Jackie: Ezra if you have a message that you could give to people 50 years from now, what would you tell them?

Ezra: Good Heavens. Well the Falls Church school system grew like mad as the population grew and it was reorganized a number of times to accommodate the financial situation and it became a very important part of Fairfax County School system after the war.

Linda: Tell me for future generations that will be moving into this area, your advice.

Ezra: They should preserve what open space there is as park land and private land rather than just make it a crowded combination of houses one right along side another. A lot of these crowded communities came along later. At first it was just individual houses along Glebe Road for example where there were big farms and presently garden apartments but what you see now are big buildings with apartments in them now, none of them existed.

Linda: What is your favorite memory of living here in Fairfax County?

Ezra: The semi-rural area was very attractive and there were a lot of open fields and a lot of community activity and as I said across the street was a single farm from the top of the hill to all the way down here and it was several blocks long. And it got to the point where he grew many potatoes and he use to ship many truckloads of potatoes.

Further West was a little wooded area with deer and I remember the farmer use to plow his potato fields with horses and then he had laborers come in and rake up the potatoes and put them on the trucks to be carried to the urban areas. During all of this the deer came out of the woods and ate the exposed potatoes and the trucks that carried the potatoes threw out the bad ones or the ones that were actually cut by the plows and the deer enjoyed those. The deer use to come all the way up here from the farm.

Linda: I thank you Ezra and Jackie do you have anything to add?

Jackie: No, but I am surprised that Ezra's advice to the future generation was don't build cars. Because every time we go out on a drive or run errands he is amazed by the number of cars on the road.

Linda: I meant to ask him about a Bud Demming.

Ezra: I knew Ed Demming very well. He was a mathematician and he worked for various educational institutions including the University of Maryland. I am trying to remember where he lived, it wasn't far from here.

Linda: What was his premise?

Ezra: Well he was a mathematician so he worked for various outfits during and including the war.

Linda: Was he the one that gave some advice about buying or producing things that mathematically that worked better if you.

Ezra: I am trying to remember how he was established.

Linda: I believe it was something to do with Japan.

Ezra: That is right, he was on the Japanese Commission which was established to assist the Japanese in their post war recovery and he in fact lived there for a while in Japan so he could be useful.

Linda: And his idea of what works in the recovery they used in Japan became very successful in selling cars.

Ezra: Yes, he had an automobile establishment that sold and serviced cars and I am trying to remember where the center was, it was along Glebe Road.

Linda: So you have met some very interesting and influential people as well as being one yourself.

Ezra: Well the population was rather small and the professional community was really quite small so we all knew each other and of each other's activities. I remember him very well, he use to visit here. I am trying to reconstruct the way I felt 20 and 30 years ago we watched with some dismay the increase in urbanization in the area because the people were quite use to having big trees and open fields all over the place, and dairy farms.

Linda: I want to thank you for this interview and Jackie it was a pleasure meeting you.

Ezra: Well I thank you but I have to tell you that my mind is quite fuzzy about the way I have answered some of these questions.

Linda: No, you were very clear and I thank you again.